



MISSION

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CATALYST

Intelligent comment on faith and culture

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Islam: is our attitude too black and white?

*A WIND IN THE
HOUSE OF ISLAM*

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THIS EDITORIAL IS NOT PARTICULARLY CLEVER

Compared to everything you'll hear
at **Catalyst Live** 2018.

If you've been to **Catalyst Live** before, you'll know it features big ideas, deep thought and profoundly entertaining speakers who both challenge and inspire. But don't take our word for it. Here's what one of our previous speakers had to say about his fellow contributors:

“I CAN'T WAIT for CATALYST LIVE. It never fails to stretch my mind and feed my soul. It's like a **CHRISTIAN TED TALKS**, but more fun than that sounds. Looking at the line-up for November 2018, I am really excited. It's great that BMS puts on such a challenging event, **NO-ONE ELSE IS DOING ANYTHING LIKE THIS.”**

Glen Marshall

Co-Principal of the Northern Baptist College



And this year it's going to be just as good. We have the legendary **Stanley Hauerwas**, a theologian and author everyone should be reading in the person of **Paula Gooder**, RZIM star **Amy Orr-Ewing** talking about literature rather than apologetics, and a host of other seriously smart people speaking on subjects you didn't even know you needed to know more about.

In addition, we have the wonderful **Harry and Chris** who blend poetry, music and comedy and who you've likely seen on TV or at the Edinburgh Fringe, and a special appearance at one of our venues, by **Alistair Brown**.

The venues are:

Birmingham

7 November

St Martin in the Bull Ring

Bristol

8 November

The DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel

Tickets are **only £32.50**
and are available at

www.bmscatalystlive.com

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BOOK YOUR TICKETS TODAY.**

ISLAM IS NOT THE ENEMY, CONFLATION IS



You'd be forgiven for thinking it.

Is that..? No, it can't be! It is! Yikes!

And to be fair, we made it easy for you. Black background. Similar layout. It does look a little bit like the Islamic State/Daesh flag. But it isn't. It's some writing in white on a black background, with a rounded mostly white form underneath it. That's a description of the ISIS flag, for sure, but it's also a description of the *Mighty Boosh* logo. And Noel Fielding (star of that hit BBC comedy series) is many things, but an Islamic fundamentalist is not high on that list.

The fact that the writing is (for the most part) in Arabic, makes it easier to make assumptions. We don't know what it's saying, and that, combined with the design, means we could be forgiven for feeling a little bit queasy at seeing it on the cover of a Christian magazine. But let's also be honest: if that was Mandarin Chinese or French, we wouldn't have been nearly as nervous.

The writing in Arabic does not say "Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant", nor does it say "Death to America, of course". It says: "Islam is not the enemy". But it could have said "Jesus is Lord", written in pink on a powder-blue background and some of us would still be uncomfortable with it, were it in that unfamiliar script. We are naturally suspicious of what we don't understand and, if we are honest, we understand very little about Islam.

We know what we read in the news, what we see on TV – a narrative associating the entire religion of Islam with its outliers and most violent exponents, connecting something as neutral as a language, a mode of dress, an ethnic group with something as appalling as terrorism.

What we read less is stories of Muslims protecting Christians from persecution. Scott Higgins, a friend of BMS and partner in our relief work in the Asia Pacific region, sent this story to us recently:

A colleague of mine is a Baptist pastor who lives in a part of Indonesia that is characterised by high levels



of Islamic fundamentalism. He was attending a conference in Australia when news filtered through that there had been an outbreak of religious violence in his home town. Churches were being burnt down and there was concern that Christians might be killed. As soon as he heard the news, my colleague rang home, worried about his child and wife. His fears were allayed when he learned that his Muslim neighbours were with his family to ensure they would stay safe, and that, should the violence escalate, the Imam had offered them protection in the mosque.

Another colleague of mine spent fifteen years as a missionary in Burkina Faso, where he lived and worked among strongly Islamic tribespeople. He formed strong friendships with a number of Imams and told me that his children were never more safe than when they were out in the bush playing with their Muslim neighbours.

Stories like these are disarming, even confronting, for they don't fit the narrative of suspicion through which many frame the relationship between Islam and the West.

Scott himself has helped BMS and Baptist networks respond with love and neighbourliness to Muslims facing persecution in Asia, namely the Rohingya people, whose plight was for a while highlighted in our news. Christians around

the world have prayed, given and helped their Muslim neighbours in person – which is a wonderful story, and quite at odds with the persecution narrative to which we all too often default.

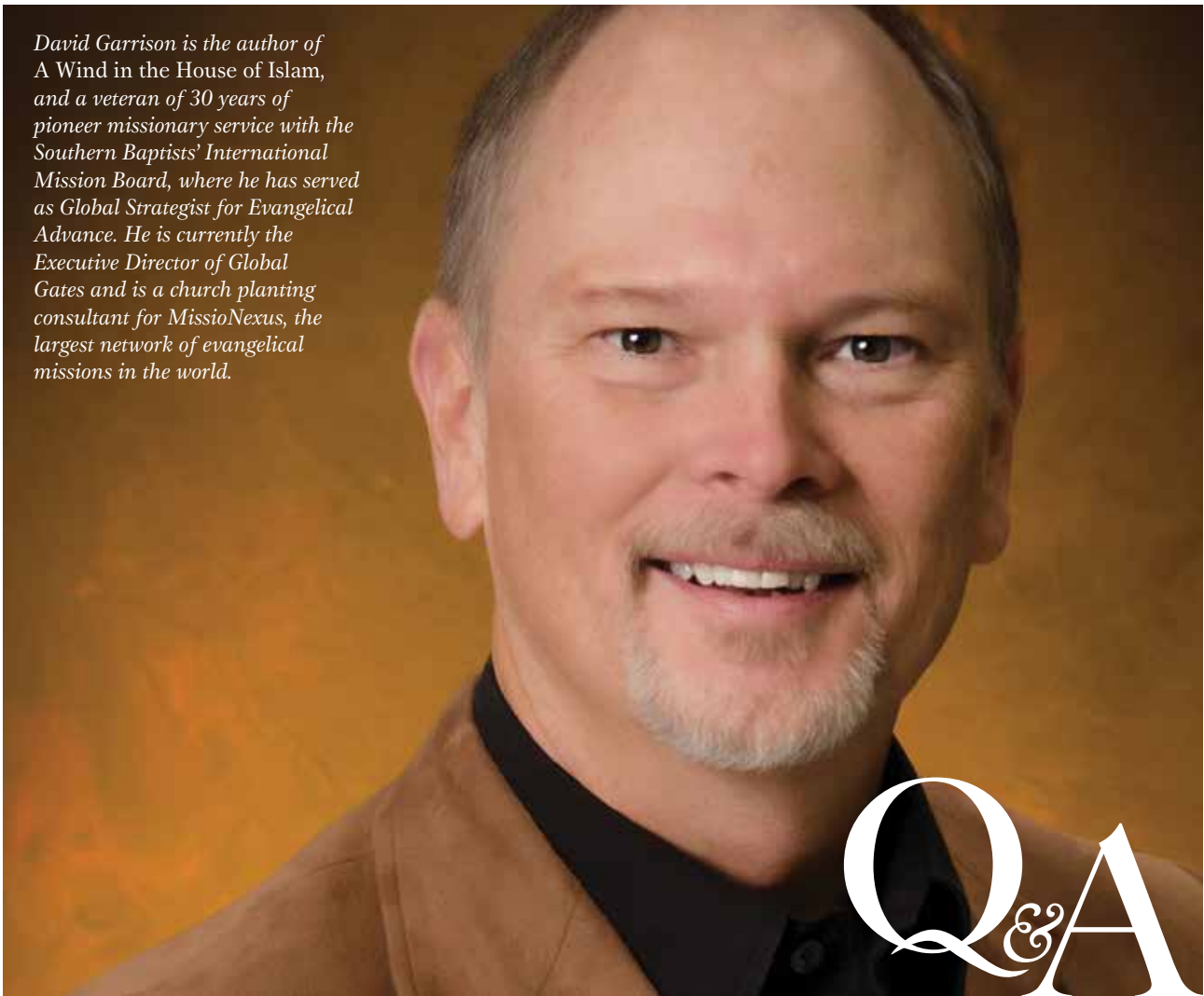
In an era of bigotry made confident by Presidents and tabloids (and of real and awful terrorism committed in the name of Islam) it is more important than ever that Christians of good will learn to stop conflating Arabic with Islam, Islam with terrorism, Muslims with the concept of an enemy.

This is important not just to serve some liberal or pluralist ideal. It's important because among the proxy wars in Muslim countries and the targeting of Muslims in our country there's a danger that our good news might be lost. This is important for our witness as well as for the cause of justice.

Whether you're conservative or liberal, or somewhere in between, I hope you find something in this magazine that helps you think a little deeper about Islam and the people loved by God who find themselves a part of it. And I hope that deeper thought is used by God to make his kingdom known a little more.

Jonathan Langley
Head of Creative Content
BMS World Mission

David Garrison is the author of A Wind in the House of Islam, and a veteran of 30 years of pioneer missionary service with the Southern Baptists' International Mission Board, where he has served as Global Strategist for Evangelical Advance. He is currently the Executive Director of Global Gates and is a church planting consultant for MissioNexus, the largest network of evangelical missions in the world.



Q&A

DAVID GARRISON

*ISLAM IS NOT THE ENEMY, BUT IT IS A MISSION FIELD.
A MISSION RESEARCHER DISCUSSES MUSLIM-CONTEXT
FAITH IN CHRIST.*

The narrative that Islam is the enemy, that Islam is inherently violent, oppressive, terroristic, has a lot of supporters in the West. What do you think of that?

It's absolutely false. Lostness is the enemy, is it not? One of the ways it expresses itself is through secularism in which we say this whole issue is nonsense, 'there is no heaven, there is no hell, there is no God, so let's just move on with it'. That's an expression of lostness. And it is

the enemy. Islam is a religious response to lostness and it's a rather clever response, it's been very effective. It actually is the only world religion that is tailor-made to counter Christianity. And it has succeeded quite brilliantly for about 14 centuries. Much of what was the heartland of Christianity is now the heartland of Islam and that's evidence of its success. Does that make it the enemy? No, Lostness is the enemy still.

We're dealing with individuals, men

and women, boys and girls, who need a saviour. They need a relationship with God that is revealed and presented and offered through Jesus Christ. And their religious alternatives they've created are really just that. They're religious alternatives that men and women have come up with that circumvent their need to embrace Christ and what he has revealed to us about the Father, about God's plan for all peoples. So I think it's dangerous whenever we tip one religion against another as if Christianity

offers salvation. Christianity doesn't offer salvation, Jesus Christ offers salvation. That's God's plan and Christianity is a by-product of that.

Likewise, Islam is not even one thing, it's 23 per cent of the world's population and thousands of different expressions and every expression of it is made up of individuals who are lost, apart from Jesus Christ.

The phenomenon of 'insider movements', particularly in Islam, is one that excites great interest in missiological circles, evidenced by the success of your book, *A Wind in the House of Islam*. What does the term mean?

Insider movements mean so many things to so many different people. I've seen people use it to refer to any sort of contextualisation or contextualised presentation of the gospel to Muslims. It's actually sometimes used as a pejorative term in missiological arguments. There are sectors of the Christian community that consider it a real threat. It's been associated with the 'Islamisation' of missions, the Islamisation of Christianity. There are some polemical denunciations of insider movements.

But what I've found is there's not a clear definition. It refers in general to when the gospel of Jesus Christ is accepted by an Islamic people and they try to remain within their Islamic culture. Perhaps incognito following Jesus Christ in a discreet manner that allows them to remain within their family and culture and retain as many of their Islamic cultural practices as possible without compromising their faith and allegiance to Jesus Christ. So that would seem to be a core definition.

What motivates the hostility and the fear of contextualising faith in Jesus in a Muslim context? Is there specifically something about Islam that brings out these really strong feelings?

It's been said that if you have two species that are similar grazing on the same terrain, that one will eventually supplant the other. I think the Jewish faith experienced that as Christianity emerged, they felt very threatened. And rightly so, as history came to disclose. And likewise, when Islam emerged, it was a sense of 'one or the other'. And that history has been a bloody history that's carried on now for 14 centuries. So I think that the sort of hostility that Christians feel is almost an intuitive response to Islam that grows out

of a sort of fuzzy history. A sense of 'who are these people and why are they using our language and why are they referring to our holy history and co-opting it into their own story?' And I think that creates a sense of fear, and out of fear comes a defensiveness that is a natural response.

“Islam is not even one thing, it's 23 per cent of the world's population”

Has Christianity become so entrenched in our culture that different expressions of it don't look like Christianity? Or is the fear more theological, about syncretism and contextualisation going too far?

I think it's somewhere on the line between genuine theological concern and a failure to see our own contextualised Christianity. Many of the people who are so critical of an accommodation or contextualisation of the gospel to Muslims fail to see that many aspects of Islamic culture are much closer to the first century Semitic culture in which Jesus found himself, than our 21st century European or American culture, which is so radically different.

It's interesting how un-self-aware we can be of the accommodations we've made, whether it's Christmas trees and Easter bunnies or even the secular ways that we do our church services. Much of what's considered accommodation to Islamic forms is often accommodation to a much more biblical, Semitic form. And that shouldn't be a problem, even though many people are troubled by it.

The idea of taking your shoes off to go into a place of worship, for instance. Some Christians think this is appalling. But wasn't Moses instructed to take off his shoes as he was on holy ground? We're just oblivious to these things because we don't see our culture as being an accommodation, an incarnation if you will, of the gospel into our context.

But there *are* some theological issues. Issues over translation. You want to communicate to Muslims in a language and in a style that will make the gospel clear, but you don't want to distort the translation in a way that will obscure the uniqueness of it. Missiologists and translators and theologians have come together and said the removal of familial language from translations is a bridge

too far. The concern over the last decade was that Muslims have an immediate aversion to the idea that God has a Son. And we Christians will say, 'well we don't mean he had a son in the sense that God had a baby, it's a relationship within the trinity.' So some have tried to remedy that

misunderstanding by removing familial language, removing 'Father' or removing 'Son' and replacing it with simply 'God' and 'Messiah'. And though these sorts of accommodations were well intentioned, I think there's an emerging consensus among missiologists and theologians saying that that really obscures the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and it's really a bridge too far. That it goes beyond contextualisation and into accommodation and even deception, because it implies that this is not a stumbling block. Frankly, it was a stumbling block to the first century Jewish community and it's been a stumbling block to virtually every community since. So we can't remove that.

Another narrative in the West is that we should 'encourage moderates' within Islam, that we should intervene in Muslim theological debates. I'd find a similar approach to Christianity offensive. What's your view on approaching Islam that way?

Well it's a humanist agenda, it's a secular agenda, it's an agenda for 'let's get along better'. Because you can get along better with a liberal Muslim like Fareed Zakaria on CNN than you can with a hard-line Muslim, there's no doubt about that. So yeah, I think it's great when Muslims behave more nicely to everyone and don't have a world domination agenda.

However, there's a sense of which that's none of our business. I mean I'm not opposed to people doing that, I think that's fine. But again, if you believe that Jesus is God's one way of salvation and that's what biblical evangelicals believe, then a good Muslim or a hard-line Muslim or a moderate Muslim, they all have the same need, they need a Saviour. That doesn't change.



WITNESSING TO THE 'ENEMY': 5 PRINCIPLES FOR ETHICAL EVANGELISM

WHAT CAN YOUTH WORK, THE CONVERSION OF SAUL AND THE 'GOLDEN RULE' TEACH US ABOUT REACHING OUT TO MUSLIMS?

What motivates us, as Christians, to share our faith with others of a different faith? What hinders us from doing so? What might enable us to not only be more confident in sharing our faith, but also allow for more likelihood of a

positive response from those we share with, particularly within the context of a relationship with a Muslim?

Many of our Muslim friends in the UK are surprised how little Christians are willing to speak openly about their faith

with them. For many Muslims, who are also called to share their faith with others, it does not make sense that Christians would not wish to do the same. Surely, they might think, if they are called to love our neighbour, as we are, then sharing



Arthur Brown

BMS Regional Leader for Europe, the Middle East and North Africa and former BMS youth and theological worker based in Lebanon, working with a Christian theological seminary regularly dialoguing with Islamic scholars.

so-called Muslim forms of worship and religious vocabulary as wrong, without knowing that virtually all Qur'anic religious vocabulary, including the name 'Allah', and virtually all the forms of worship, except those specifically related to Muhammad, were used by Jews and/or Christians before they were used by Muslims." There are of course some fundamental differences. However, our starting point is important. Miroslav Volf in *Allah: A Christian Response* asks the question: do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? Now is not the

older, as an individual's human right. Western Christian faith has become a very private and personal affair. However, the reality for many contexts around the world, including for the majority of the global Muslim world, is that this presents significant challenges. Islam is not viewed simply as an individual choice, something to be accepted or rejected by an individual without significant social and communal consequence and pain. It is not easy for a Muslim to distinguish between the socio-cultural, political, financial, religious and spiritual elements of their faith in the way

“ Muslim friends are surprised how little Christians speak about their faith ”

the hope they have found in Christ is the epitome of a loving action? But is this really the case?

Taking as read that Islam is a hugely complex socio-cultural, religious and spiritual phenomenon that is understood and practised in countless numbers of ways, how do you view the overarching religion of Islam? Your starting point here will affect your interaction with Muslims when it comes to the desired outcome of your witness.

Are you more inclined to start with an approach that focuses on the similarities between both Christian and Islamic thought and practice, or one that focuses on the differences? It is clear from a fairly basic understanding of Islam that there are many similarities between our faiths. Dudley Woodberry makes the important point that many missionaries “branded

time to delve in to this complex question, but again, how you answer this question will impact significantly your witness towards Muslims.

Many of us have a difficult relationship with evangelism, perhaps especially when this involves intentional discussion or argument about the Christian faith with someone of a different faith, or non-faith. Andrew Smith, when discussing ethical witness in his new book *Vibrant Christianity in Multifaith Britain*, makes the interesting point that, if our witness to people of different faiths is indeed to be a loving act, then those we are witnessing to need to *experience* this witness as a loving act. It strikes me that the attempt to 'love Muslims' while 'hating Islam' is not really a healthy starting position. However, perhaps it is even more than simply the words we use, or the tone in which they are spoken, that portrays a perceived lack of love from the perspective of the recipient.

In much of western culture, the decision to change faith is one that may be taken, to a large degree, in isolation from a person's wider community. This is viewed, at least under international law for those aged eighteen years or

much of Christian practice has become compartmentalised. As a result, the way in which we witness to and disciple would-be followers of Christ who are Muslim takes on a whole new set of considerations. Is it our intention to lead Muslims out of one flawed religious institution (that of Islam) simply into another flawed religious institution (that of Christianity)? What might be the consequences for our witness, were we to lay aside much of what 'our Christianity' has become, and focus instead on the person of Christ, within the context of relationships with Muslims, within their family and community?

My sense is that in many cases this would break down many of the fears within the Muslim community, as we would not be asking people to reject their families, traditions, culture or even much of their religious tradition, *unless* elements of these were at direct odds with the gospel. And, anyway, when was the last time we expected a newfound believer in Christ in the UK to renounce their consumerism or their nationality?

So, how might we witness to Muslims in what might be described as an ethical way? Here are a few thoughts which I hope might start or further a conversation.

1. It's about relationship, and not conversion

As a youth worker I have always held the view that my role was to visit young people within a context that was safe for them – on their patch, so to speak. Entering their culture as a guest and seeking to learn from them as well as earning the right to share with them. This approach has stood me in good stead as I have got to know Muslims from all sorts of social and ethnic backgrounds, both in the UK and the Middle East. My role, as a follower of Christ, is to be faithful to him. To demonstrate, through words and actions, the significance of him in my life and allow the Holy Spirit to do what it will do.

2. It's communal not individual – and it takes time

The all too common approach of seeking individual converts and extracting them from their context can have disastrous consequences not only for the individual themselves, their family and community, but also for Christian witness. How might the gospel become genuinely good news for Muslim families and communities in a way that honours their deeply held existing faith? Expecting new followers of Christ to start attending a Christian church, or even calling themselves Christian, is something that may be seen by some as the ultimate act of betrayal and sedition. However, having a more Christocentric [rather than ecclesio-centric] approach may allow for a more genuine and contextually relevant expression of faith in Christ, in which community is formed from within rather than from without.

3. The golden rule

I think we often forget one of Jesus' main teachings – the 'golden rule' – that we should behave towards others in the way that we would like them to behave towards us. I don't know about you, but if someone attacks my faith in an attempt to share their faith with me or seek my conversion, I am far less likely to listen, engage

“ When last did we expect a new believer in Christ to renounce consumerism or nationality? ”

or respond positively or with respect. Regardless of the approaches of others, we have a duty not to negate the gospel by the way we witness. If you are prepared to invite a Muslim friend to a Christian activity, would you be prepared to attend an event at their mosque? If not, why not? Are you prepared to ask your Muslim friend to pray for you? Are you willing to learn about their faith, while also talking about yours, and give their faith the respect that you would hope they would give yours? The Feast have some fantastic guidelines for dialogue, of which one of my favourites is 'speak positively about my own faith rather than negatively about the faith of someone else'. For me, this does not negate the potential for a discussion as to the differences between our faiths, as it is important not to sweep these under the carpet. It does, however, remind me of the tone I should take when addressing differences as well as similarities.

4. Conversion [in the traditional sense] is overrated!

As a Christ-follower who has worked with Muslim young people for many years, I have come to the conclusion that I am not interested in Muslim young people becoming Christians! This may sound like a shocking statement, but I am convinced of it. This DOES NOT MEAN that I am any less committed to seeing young [and old] Muslims coming into a living faith in Jesus, and following him in every aspect of their lives. I am desperate to see this, and grateful that I have had the opportunity to do so. But, consider when Saul met Christ on his way to Damascus, did he become a Christian? Did he stop attending the temple and participating in worship there? Did he stop referring to the Jewish leaders as 'brothers', to whom he had done "nothing against our people or the customs of our ancestors" (Acts 28: 17-20)? The answer to each of these questions must be a categorical no! However, were

his faith, his belief system, socio-religious practices and sense of identity [at least in part] transformed towards more of a Christ-aligned discourse? Absolutely! An ethical approach to witness, I would argue, takes very seriously the social, religious, cultural and spiritual history of the person to whom we are witnessing, and does not seek to dismantle that, if there is no requirement from what has been referred to as the 'naked gospel' – the core elements of our faith in Christ.

5. Every situation is different

People's faith journey and process of change are different for each individual and take place at different paces. So too does their own self-perception, and the perception of others towards them. At times our own approaches may not be entirely compatible with what God may want to be doing with certain individuals and communities. We need to let go of the control we so often feel the need to hold on to in order to ensure 'orthodoxy' – and allow God to do as he wishes in the lives of those he loves and sent his Son to die for.

Regardless of your view of Islam and of its followers, can we really refer to them as enemies? Who are your enemies? Can you name them? My sense is that if we are faithful followers of Jesus, it becomes very hard to label individuals, communities or even nations and religions in terms of enmity. I do not understand Jesus when he says "love your enemies" as, surely, if you love them, they cease to be your enemies. If he had said 'love those who appear very different to you', or 'those you would never invite to church, or dinner, or spend time with', it would make more sense. Maybe this is what the challenge for us is today? Deciding who it is that we might perceive of as being at odds with our way of living and believing, and working out *how* we are to love them.

Mitch Randall

Executive Director of the Baptist Center for Ethics and EthicsDaily.com. Follow him on Twitter @rmitchrandall.

NOT MY ENEMY, BUT MY FRIEND

DONALD TRUMP HAS REPEATEDLY MADE MUSLIMS THE FOCUS OF ENMITY IN THE UNITED STATES. THIS IS AT ODDS WITH BOTH BAPTIST AND AMERICAN VALUES.

Goodwill Christians have a difficult time understanding President Donald J Trump's attitude, rhetoric and policies that single out Muslims as evil people seeking to cause harm to the US.

On the campaign trail in 2015, Candidate Trump remarked, "Donald J Trump is calling for a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." Soon after his inauguration as President, Trump issued an executive order targeting Muslim countries with a travel ban. Thankfully, a federal court of appeals has continuously ruled against the executive order.

The President and his supporters tend to paint with broad strokes dipped into narrow and biased stereotypes that do not consider the billions of peaceful and honourable Muslims around the world. One such Muslim is my good friend Imam Imad Enchassi. Imam Enchassi serves the Greater Oklahoma City Mosque. While the Imam has been unfairly treated time and time again as an enemy of Christianity, I count him as a dear friend.

There is a growing trend that lumps all Muslims together and characterises them as the enemy. This false notion is egregiously opposed to the heart of Christianity, the central tenants of my Baptist faith, and the American ideal.

As a Christian minister, I find this line of reasoning and applied ideology egregiously opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

During Jesus' life and ministry, he engaged and welcomed the strangers among his people, even when his people

felt differently about them. From the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4: 1-42) to healing the servant of a Roman Centurion (Matthew 8: 5-13), Jesus practised what he preached.

As a Baptist minister, I find elected officials using faith as a tool for persecution and harassment terrifying. In the 17th century, Baptists were persecuted, imprisoned and publicly whipped for

line of discrimination and exclusion based upon religious conviction. Revolutionary Baptist pastor John Leland expressed his sentiments for a liberal democracy when he declared, "The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever... Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely and see that one does not abuse another. The liberty I contend for is more than

“ There is no difference between what 17th century Puritan magistrates were doing and what President Trump is doing today ”

advocating a faith different from that of the majority. This kind of religious persecution prompted Roger Williams to declare in 1644, "An enforced uniformity of religion throughout a nation or civil state, confounds the civil and religious, denies the principles of Christianity and civility, and that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh."

In that same year, Massachusetts 'outlawed' being a Baptist altogether, declaring them to be a danger to the state. The New England magistrates felt as though Baptists were a terror in their own right, causing chaos and mayhem among their commonwealth. In my opinion, there is no difference between what 17th century Puritan magistrates were doing and what President Trump is doing today.

As a US citizen, I am appalled at this

toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest to grant indulgence, whereas all should be equally free, Jews, Turks, Pagans, and Christians."

Therefore, as a Christian and Baptist minister, I proudly stand beside my Muslim brothers and sisters because I genuinely believe this is what Jesus would do. As a US citizen, I stand beside them because the American ideal remains one of welcoming and inclusion.

As immigrants entered into New York harbour, they discovered this poem written on the Statue of Liberty: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses to breathe free." To my Muslim brothers and sisters, I want to say this: "I do not consider you an enemy, but a friend."

LOVE YOUR (MUSLIM) NEIGHBOUR

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOURS MUST BEGIN WITH
ABANDONING OUR FEAR OF THE 'OTHER' AND TRYING
TO UNDERSTAND THEIR EXPERIENCE.

Once, some time ago, I was talking to a group of visiting Americans outside my church following our Sunday morning worship service. They had headed out of the church as soon as the benediction was spoken, unaware of the strange British custom of staying for a cup of coffee and talking to each other. We carried on typical polite visitors' conversation until one of them suddenly said, "Aren't you afraid?"

I must have looked puzzled as to what was meant, because she immediately went on to say, "... with all these Muslims around here."

I should explain that my church is in the midst of a part of Manchester with about 40 per cent Muslim population. I looked around and realised that there were, indeed, a number of South Asians walking past on their way to and from the shops – notable by their South Asian dress. This is my neighbourhood, where I live as well as worship, and this is 'normal' England for

me. I had never thought I should be afraid.

It is nearly 40 years since my family first arrived in this part of the city. The first night, having gone to bed early in our new home after a long international journey, we were awakened at midnight by the sound of laughter and talking on the street outside our window – it was Ramadan, and our neighbours were sharing their fast-breaking *Iftar* meal together. Most of the children

racial and multi-cultural Britain.

Coming from a very white small-town background, this was a culture shock that took time to process. But we are still here, and embrace the diversity of our city with curiosity and delight.

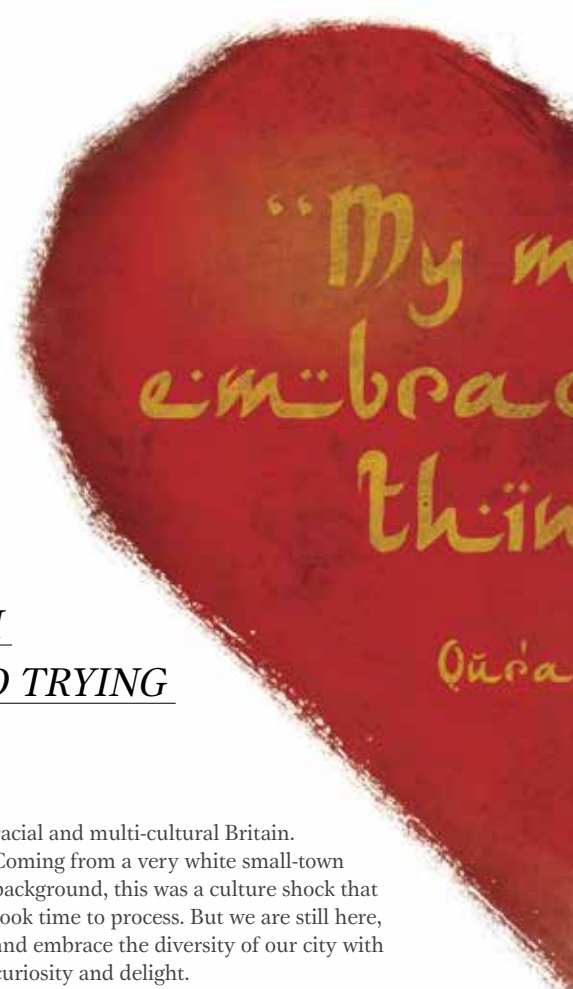
So it was that I was taken aback by my first encounter with the extent of fear felt by much of American Christianity towards all things Muslim, a fear that now has its

**“Some Christians consider
Islam to be demonic”**

on our street were of Pakistani descent, and within a couple weeks our son was speaking with a fluent Pakistani-English accent. Such was our introduction to multi-

indigenous counterpart in the UK.

Fear of Islam is, of course, nothing new. Islam has been the significant 'Other' in the Christian imagination since the



shock of the conquest of Jerusalem in AD 637 – in just five years after the death of Mohammad. Between the first Crusade of 1095 to the Battle of Vienna in 1683 Europe warred against Islamic forces. The worry about the ‘enemy’ at the borders continued into the colonial era, which saw European resurgence and Ottoman decline. In our own day the news is filled with stories of conflict in Muslim



countries, and, most disconcertingly, the spill-over of those conflicts onto the streets and cities of the West.

Not only history, but also decades of film media portrayals of Middle Eastern men as unshaven villains for the western hero to dispatch, has planted the picture of the Typical Terrorist in the minds of two generations. The so-called War on Terror, so clearly focussed on Islamic groups, was declared in 2001 and has neither end nor victor in sight. We have become painfully aware in recent months of the role of social media, as well as newspaper headlines, in fomenting racial and religious hatred and acts of violence.

What does a Christian response look like?

Some Christians consider Islam to be demonic, the force of darkness in the battle between good and evil. Viewing the interaction of Christians and Muslims in terms of spiritual warfare is a negative starting point that predisposes the Christian to view any Muslim as a dangerous adversary, rather than as a



person made in God's image, for whom Christ gave himself. More dangerously, demonisation is but one step to dehumanisation; and that, too often, is just one step shy of being complacent at their deaths, or even of justifying the violence of actual war.

Some Christians are worried about Islamic evangelism, and supposed secret plans to introduce Sharia Law in the West. Firstly, it might be noted that, with barely five per cent of the UK population, Muslims are not in a position to ‘impose’ any law. Beyond this, however, it is true that Islam is a missionary faith. Just as is Christianity – so much so that we send

both, the family is at the heart of society. There is respect for authority, as well as concern over the violence of our society, the challenges of finding a good education for our children, and the safeguarding of our healthcare.

This is not to diminish the significance of profound differences between Christianity and Islam, which must be acknowledged and addressed. But the starting point for addressing difficult questions is not, firstly, in debate over beliefs, but in building relationships. The challenge for us all is living in a pluralist society with shared common virtues, while recognising differences that will not simply

“ Films portray Middle Eastern men as unshaven villains for the western hero to dispatch ”

missionaries to every part of the world in the hope that whole nations may come to Christ. And we wish that Muslims might be followers of Christ. It may seem threatening to have competition in evangelism. But, if we fear Muslims sharing their faith, what does that reflect on how much confidence we have in Christ, the gospel, and the work of the Holy Spirit?

These are fear-based responses. The starting point for Christians, rather, needs to be the command of our Lord: “Love your neighbour as yourself”. We start with the humanity of the ‘Other’ – they are our neighbours. They are people of flesh and blood with hopes and dreams, just like us. Christians and Muslims share many values: as often stated, we are ‘Abrahamic’ faiths with reverence for Scripture; for

go away, and addressing the differences in conversation rather than through force.

One final observation. Three years ago, after 35 years of living in England, my wife and I became citizens – American British. Not long after, when someone asked me where I am from, I answered, “I’m British”, and they responded, “No you’re not!”

In that moment I felt, in just a very minor way, what it must feel like for British born Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage young people to be told, “You’re not British. Go home!”

A British Christian response should be that of hospitality. This does not merely mean eating together, although it can include that. It means welcoming Muslims as people whom Christ loves, and as those whom we would have as our friends.

Shabbir Akhtar

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7 things MUSLIMS WANT CHRISTIANS TO KNOW

A MUSLIM SCHOLAR TALKS ASSIMILATION, TERROR AND RADICALISATION

The fastest growing religion in Europe is the irrational fear of Islamic values and culture. Here are some points to consider, lest you fall into its grasp.



1. Islam is not a threat to you

Modern Islam is a powerless faith wherever Muslims live as minorities; it is the sole official state faith in some of the roughly 60 Muslim majority sovereign nations. None are militarily as powerful as any western nation. Though Muslim nations provide a quarter of the UN membership, none exercises veto power. Prejudice is no monopoly of white people, however, Muslim prejudices against the host culture do not matter: prejudice without power can be safely ignored.



2. Trying to change Islam from the outside is pointless

What cannot be ignored is the prevalent State scrutiny and surveillance of Muslim citizens in education and in their mosques. We should permit victimised minorities to attain to legitimate power. If they subsequently misbehave, we can apply the full penalty of the law. The current Government unwisely singles out the most unrepresentative members of the Muslim community to engage with. They should deal with Muslim leaders who are organically part of the community they claim to serve. Getting a few mavericks to agree with an existing policy is hardly an achievement even for some immature new democracy, let alone for the British one.



3. Islam has to be political

The Government is engaged in social engineering and wants, like many oppressive Muslim-majority states, to create a politically neutered Islam, one that poses no threat to unjust vested interests. But Islam cannot accommodate injustice. Muslims are religiously obliged to challenge it – as witnesses for God's sake. The Qur'an calls Muslims a balanced community, centred and moderate. They are required to retain a critical distance between themselves and the wider secular culture they seek to correct and reform. There is also the *via media*, the middle path between Jewish legalism and the Christian rejection of the inherited Jewish law.



ISLAM IS NOT A THREAT TO YOU TRYING TO CHANGE ISLAM FROM THE OUTSIDE IS POINTLESS

ISLAM HAS TO BE POLITICAL

THE PROBLEM IS NOT A REFUSAL TO ADOPT BRITISH VALUES

TAKING OUR RELIGION SERIOUSLY DOES NOT MAKE US RADICALS

POLITICAL ISLAM IS NOT INHERENTLY INTOLERANT

BRITAIN NEEDS MUSLIMS

“ Any move towards social conservatism is misinterpreted as radicalisation ”



6. Political Islam is not inherently intolerant

Islam is not an enemy of the Christian West, though it remains a rival for the hand of God's grace and has had, until 1924, a competing colonial history. When Islam was a powerful empire, corresponding to Christendom, it gave the world political stability and a lenient ascendancy towards its Jewish and Christian subject peoples. They were appreciated as errant but privileged monotheists sharing the legacy of Father Abraham. Muslims gave the world scholarship and scientific learning – for curiosity is only a by-product of real power. Once Muslims were weakened by western colonial machinations, Muslims gave the world terrorism and obscurantism. They became unwilling to make even intelligent concessions to the secular demand for human rights and justice for all, our shared culture in the modern west. Their modern leaders became more venal, lacking all political humility: none now vacate power without the additional inducement of assassination.



4. The problem is not a refusal to adopt British values

The new orthodoxy is that western Muslims alone remain a problematic community resisting assimilation without remainder to European, including British, values. Muslims retort that only Islamic nations are in continuous conflict with the West, that they alone feel the pull of divided loyalties. Western powers do not attack the Caribbean, Israel, China or India. As for British values, these are salutary but will lack spiritual foundations once the capital of the inherited Christian faith has been depleted.



7. Britain needs Muslims

I want to end with a thought experiment for my Christian readers. Imagine if all the Muslims left the UK, voluntarily, without the financial repatriation offered by the prophet Enoch from Wolverhampton in 1968. Would that solve most of our problems, as many right wing politicians in western nations claim? Would we have only bad weather and a mediocre cricket team to cope with? Would the curries and kebabs be missed? Who would drive drunk university students to their next party?

Would a post-Muslim Britain feel ashamed? Or would people say: good riddance?



5. Taking our religion seriously does not make us radicals

By all means, the Government should fight the anarchic and psychopathic violence of some Muslim groups (though Muslims have no monopoly on such violence), but it must never overlook the legitimate grievances of western Muslims, especially illegal foreign wars. Any move towards opinions on this or towards leading an Islamic lifestyle – any social or ethical conservatism – is often misinterpreted as radicalisation.

Anna Larson

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IS ISLAM AN ENEMY OF WOMEN?

THE AUTOMATIC URGE TO LIBERATE WOMEN FROM ISLAM FAILS TO
RECOGNISE EITHER MUSLIM WOMEN'S AGENCY AND IDENTITY OR
CHRISTIANITY'S OWN PATRIARCHY PROBLEM.

For the last 14 years, I've been working in and studying Afghanistan – in my view one of the world's most beautiful and hospitable countries, vastly misrepresented in the international media. During this time, I've often been asked to talk or write about Afghan women and, by extension, women in Islam. The musings that follow are a summary of some of the thoughts I've had over these years, oftentimes comparing my own (Baptist) upbringing and life choices with those of the Afghan women and men I've worked and lived with, and gotten to know well. They also reflect conversations with Muslim and Christian friends and colleagues in the UK. But they are little more beyond – and I make no claims to theological training or to speak for anyone other than myself.

From western foreign policy, to western feminism, to the media, and to casual conversations in the street among non-Muslims, there is a general assumption that Muslim women need emancipating, which is often justified through perceptions about the burka/hijab and what it symbolises. This stems from the impression that Islam fundamentally oppresses women.

Maybe this is so. Maybe there are verses in the Qur'an that stipulate the subjugation of women (see above note on the absence of theology in this article). Considering when it was written, this would hardly be surprising. There are similar verses in the Bible that stipulate the same, (for example relating to hair coverings, roles

within churches, submission to husbands etc), and again, for the same reason, this is hardly surprising. But in some verses and examples, both texts were revolutionary in their perspectives on women – to reiterate oft-cited examples: Khadija, the Prophet's first wife, was a prominent businesswoman; early Muslims were widely held responsible for the ending of cultural practices such as the burying alive of infant girls; Jesus' respectful treatment of women; the central roles of women disciples.

West' – to human rights, to democracy, to women's position in office. These are seen and portrayed by these movements' leaders to their constituencies as neoliberal secular values imposed on a sovereign Muslim state. Equally, conservative Christian preachers define themselves in opposition to the changing global order, portraying feminism as the antithesis of biblical family values, and resisting substantive engagement with contemporary debates on the meaning of marriage, homosexuality,

“ There is a general assumption that Muslim women need emancipating ”

I would argue that it is not so much what is in the text as how these texts are used to promote patriarchal agendas – both within Muslim and Christian circles – that is problematic. The subjugation of women in modern times – which can include their systematic exclusion from leadership, the silencing of women experiencing abuse at the hands of violent husbands or church leaders, and the general promotion of Complementarianism (or wives being considered secondary/complementary to the male head of the household) suits the agendas of those who set themselves in opposition to progressive politics globally, in either religion. Conservative Islamist movements in Afghanistan generate political support and influence by setting themselves in stark opposition to 'the

and abortion. These preachers use these narratives to generate their own power and influence within a given community – and women play a central role in bolstering this influence, either by actively promoting or simply accepting the same narratives, in part because they too can generate social and political influence from upholding them. These leaders see the imposition of secular or liberal values – especially by the state – as a fundamental breach of their freedom of religion.

To some, these positions will be considered extreme – and to others, justified. But what is important here is that within both faiths, religious principles and norms (whether 'conservative', 'mainstream' or 'liberal') act as a sort of environment or metaphorical landscape



in which people interact with each other, influencing the range of choices and decisions that they make on a daily basis – just as a physical landscape might influence where roads are built and lighthouses erected.

Yet choice, within this landscape, exists. When making assumptions about the subjugation of women in Islam in particular, it is easy to overlook their ability to choose a narrative of their own that combines religious beliefs and norms with other aspects of their identity. Yes, some women – Muslims and Christians alike – are victims of patriarchal systems and/or predatory individual men. But most are not. Most make choices within these systems about how to navigate gender, faith, the social and political advantages of belonging to said faith in a given context, and their individual needs, desires and

preferences – just, incidentally, as men do. For many Muslim women, wherever they stand on the conservative-liberal continuum, faith is a key determinant of identity, but also a set of principles to live by, a support base, a source of strength, a resource, and a community. A number of Christian women friends would say the same.

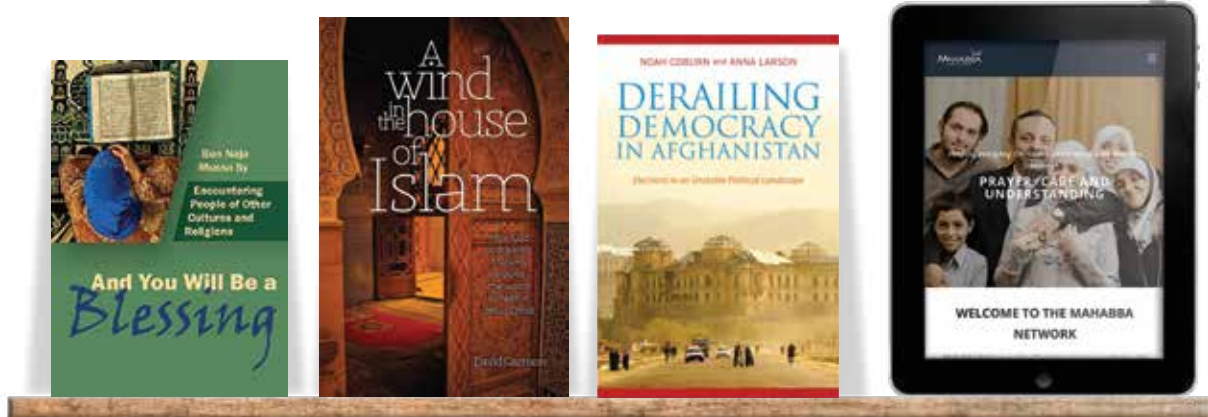
Rather than spend time deliberating whether or not either religion subjugates women, it seems to me that efforts would be far better spent recognising the negative impacts of patriarchal systems on men and women of faith everywhere. These are manifest across all society – and all denominations and branches of Islam and Christianity. Examples include the ways in which unattainable notions of masculinity are tied either explicitly or otherwise to (spiritual) leadership, breadwinning, and

the absence of caregiving/nurturing duties – making men feeling pressured into fitting these ‘ideals’ when they may feel incredibly uncomfortable doing so. Likewise, in the ways in which women are automatically expected to feel called to work with children and young people – and to forgo the opportunity to stand for leadership.

The real challenge, then, is to make sure that in our own respective faiths, we develop accountable systems that facilitate choice and enable people to challenge the status quo if they feel they need to do so, without being ostracised. If there is too much to lose, whether in terms of social standing within the Church, or family honour, for example, this challenge doesn’t happen and accepted norms become entrenched and dangerous – particularly to women. Creating space for debate can only ever be a really good thing.

ISLAM

We talk a lot about Islam, often without learning much about it or talking much to Muslims. Here are some resources to help you start engaging in a deeper way.



BOOKS

AND YOU WILL BE A BLESSING Encountering People of Other Cultures and Religions

Ben Naja and Mussa Sy
Practical advice and approaches to sharing faith and building church without pulling people into western culture.

FRIENDSHIP FIRST The Manual – Ordinary Christians Discussing Good News with Ordinary Muslims

Steven David Bell
Highly recommended by BMS director Kang-San Tan.

A WIND IN THE HOUSE OF ISLAM How God is Drawing Muslims Around the World to Faith in Jesus Christ

David Garrison

People from Muslim backgrounds all over the world are finding faith in Christ. David Garrison tells some of their stories and looks at the phenomenon.

VIBRANT CHRISTIANITY IN MULTIFAITH BRITAIN Equipping the Church for a Faithful Engagement with People of Different Faiths

Andrew Smith
Practical and theological insights for engaging with other faiths in a way that is both sensitive and distinctive.

THE ETHICS OF EVANGELISM A Philosophical Defense of Ethical Proselytizing and Persuasion

Elmer Thiessen
Current cultural and theoretical objections to 'religious persuasion' examined to defend witnessing and evangelism.

THE NEW TESTAMENT IN MUSLIM EYES Paul's Letter to the Galatians

Shabbir Akhtar
Published on 14 June, this may be the first commentary on Galatians by a Muslim scholar. Who also happens to be a Catalyst contributor.

DERAILING DEMOCRACY IN AFGHANISTAN Elections in an Unstable Political Landscape

Anna Larson and Noah Coburn
Catalyst contributor and former BMS volunteer Anna Larson examines how democracy has fared and is faring in Afghanistan.

WEB

MAHABBA

The name means 'love' in Arabic, and this site helps everyday Christians engage positively with Muslims.
www.mahabbanetwork.com

MANCHESTER CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM

Dwight Swanson is a member of this organisation building understanding between the two faiths. www.mcsci.org.uk

KITAB RESOURCES

A site to help in learning basics about Islam, and how to start talking with Muslims. Check out the book *Friendship First*, which accompanies the course. www.kitab.org.uk

WATCH

DIFFERENT BOOKS, COMMON WORD

EthicsDaily.com
Catalyst contributor Mitch Randall features in this fascinating documentary about Baptists and Muslims engaging across America.

Subscribe to *Mission Catalyst* for free at www.bmsworldmission.org/stayinformed

